



CURRENT AFFAIRS



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LANCET REPORT ON THE ISSUE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA

This article covers 'Daily Current Affairs' and the topic details of "A Lancet report on the issue of child marriage in India." This topic is relevant in the "Social Empowerment" section of the UPSC CSE exam. UPSC MAINS GS1 Syllabus : Social Empowerment, salient features of Indian society

Why in the News?

A study published in the Lancet sheds light on the persistent problem of child marriage in India, where it is particularly common in regions like West Bengal. It is well known that child marriages are common in Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, especially among females.

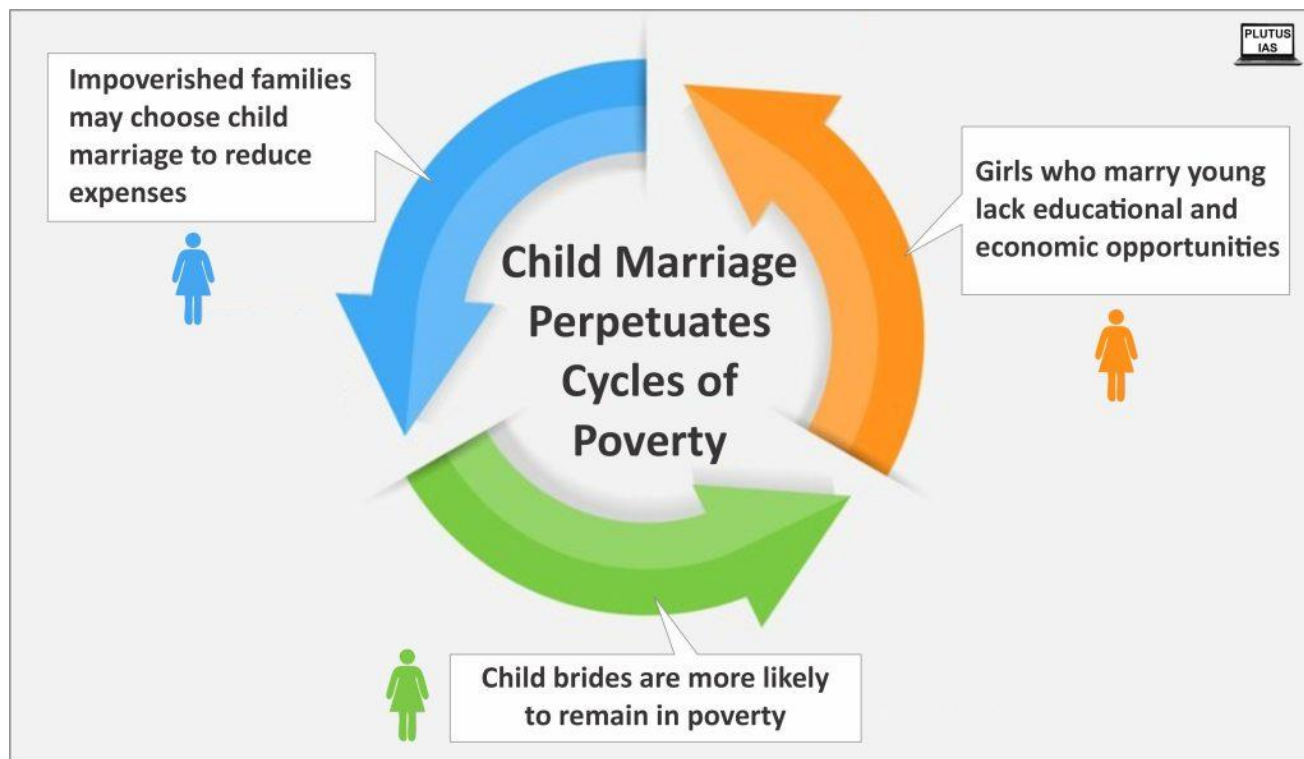
What does the report say?

- Between 1993 and 2021, the number of girl child marriages decreased in all states but Manipur.
- Researchers found that in 2021, there were 13,464,450 child marriages for girls and 14,54,894 for boys.
- According to the report, one in five Indian females gets married before they are legally allowed to do so, with significant state-by-state variations.
- Over 500,000 more females have been married as minors in West Bengal, where there has been a notable rise in child weddings.
- The researchers conclude that in order to end child marriage by 2030, there is still a pressing need for improved national and state-level policies. Scholars have observed significant differences in the frequency of child marriages between girls and boys among the states and Union Territories under investigation.
- The state with the biggest absolute rise is West Bengal, which had nearly 500,000 more girls get married as children.

Impact of Child marriage -

- Girls and boys who get married young are prone to lack the skills, knowledge, and work opportunities needed to assist their families transcend poverty and contribute to their country's social and economic growth.
- The overall fertility rate of women is elevated by 17%, causing harm to developing nations grappling with rapid population expansion.
- Child marriage is seen as a kind of sexual and gender-based violence and as a violation of human rights. West Bengal has one of the highest rates of child marriages in Murshidabad, one of the State's economically disadvantaged districts.

- Maternal and child health are negatively impacted by child marriage. In the course of a single day, 10 infants passed away at Murshidabad Medical College and Hospital. A large number of the infants were born with exceptionally low birth weights, according to hospital authorities.



Reasons for the incidence of child marriage in India

- **Lack of education:** Education is a major driver of marital age. As per NFHS-4, approximately 45% of women with no education and 40% of women with primary education married before the age of 18.
- **Poverty:** In terms of economic position, women from low-income families marry earlier. While more than 30% of women in the poorest two wealth quintiles were married by the age of 18, only 8% in the richest quintile.
- **Social background :** Child marriages are more common in rural regions especially among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Trafficking:** Poor families are lured to sell their daughters into prostitution rather than marriage since the transaction allows enormous sums of money to benefit the girl's family while harming the girl. There is apathy towards their daughters, and the proceeds from the sale of their daughters are used to help their boys.
- Girls are frequently viewed as a burden with poor economic potential. Women's work is limited to the home and is undervalued. Furthermore, there is the issue of dowry. Although dowry has been illegal in India for over five decades (Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961), it is nevertheless typical for parents of females to offer presents to the groom or his family, in cash or in goods. The dowry sum rises with the girl's age and academic level. As a result, the "incentive" of the dowry system fosters child marriages.

Government measures to curb child marriages

- **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** : This Act superseded the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, which was passed during the British reign. It defines a child as a male under the age of 21 and a female under the age of 18. According to the Majority of Act, a “minor” is someone who has not reached the age of majority. It proposes punishing child marriage with two years of harsh jail and/or a fine of Rs. 1 lakh. The Act also calls for the establishment of a Child Marriage Prohibition Officer, whose job it is to prevent child weddings and raise awareness about them.
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 proposes raising the legal marriage age for women from 18 to 21 years.

Plans/Policies to Prevent Girl Child Marriage

- **SSY (Sukanya Samridhi Yojana)**: Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY) was established in 2015 to enhance the welfare of girls. It inspires parents to invest in and plan for their daughters’ schooling and marriage expenses in the future.
- **Balika Samridhi Yojana**: Another central government plan to assist girls in financially challenged areas of society is the Balika Samridhi Yojana. This programme ensures the enrollment and retention of female students in primary and secondary institutions.

It strives to improve the well-being of a girl’s child by providing a higher-quality education.

Initiatives in bengal –

- **Kanyashree Prakalpa initiative**: A conditional donation initiative aimed at supporting teenage girls’ education and avoiding child marriage.
- **Rupashree Prakalpa**: An economically rewarding scheme for girl marriage that occasionally challenges Kanyashree’s ideals.

Measures needed to be taken

- **Education** : It is one of the most successful methods of protecting minors from marriage. When girls are allowed to continue in school, an attitude shift towards their community chances might emerge.
- **Empowerment of girls**: Every girl child should have access to life skills, protection skills, higher education, and employment prospects. Girls’ primary and secondary education should be encouraged.
- **Bringing together child protection workers**: One strategy to keep child marriages under control during the pandemic would be to have a robust cohort of child protection workers among vital health staff. In these difficult times, India has a robust system of grassroots workers who have done a great job in ensuring that health and other social security services reach people. If such personnel were integrated into the system, they could monitor girl youngsters at danger of early marriage and take preventative measures.

Conclusion

Despite regulatory measures, child marriage remains a major issue in India, particularly in districts such as West Bengal. While programmes like Kanyashree and Rupashree seek to address the problem, combining incentives with tough law enforcement is critical. To effectively oppose child marriage and

defend the rights of young girls, a concerted effort involving all stakeholders, as well as a strong political commitment, is required.

Prelims practice question:

Q1) Which of the following is a common driver of child marriages in some societies?

- A) Gender equality
- B) Economic stability
- C) Access to healthcare
- D) Strong legal frameworks

Answer: B

Mains practice question

Q1) What influence do you believe child marriage has on the general well-being and development of the young girls and boys involved?

Q2) What sociocultural elements, in your opinion, contribute to the persistence of child marriage in specific groups or regions?

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